

**DIY Workshops @ the Linux 'Caffe'**  
**Praxis and Alternative Education Practice in Toronto**  
**By: Arthur Gron**  
**January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

I started this series of DIY workshops because they are a fun and creative way to explore DIY projects and crafts. In one evening you can build something that is uniquely yours. Recycled art, crafts, Burning Man, Myth Busters, Wiki, Youtube, Linux are all about a new ethos of creating things for yourself. This series intended to be a small part of that, the projects may not be intensive but they will be something that you can walk away with having an artwork that you just created yourself.

All four workshops were held at the Linux Caffe, 326 Harbord St., Toronto, between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. For a cost of \$5 per person.

The workshop at the Linux Caffe is in a garage adjacent to the building. A fairly large space filled with used electronic and wood working equipment.

The schedule of events was as follows:

Tuesday, December, 16th: Jewellery, pins, cufflinks, from old electronics. Create fun works of art and recycle at the same time. Bring what materials you can, we have lots to spare.

Tuesday, January, 13th: Build a scrap-robot-sculpture. Using old electronic parts, built yourself a cool robot sculpture. Bring your old computer parts, and recyclables, if you don't have any we have plenty to share.

Tuesday, January, 20th: Build a wind chime from an old computer.

Tuesday, January 27th: Build a working USB fan from the motor of an old CDROM.

I've included some details about how the workshops came to be, with reflection where possible.

**2006**

Learn about 'Linux Caffe' while surfing the internet for possible groups to affiliate with when working on the Toronto Public Space Committee - Streets To Screens campaign.

**November 2007**

Start going to Linux Cafe for coffee, have time with rehabilitating from a broken wrist.

**November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

Send Dave an email who owns the cafe my idea of running DIY workshops at his venue.

**December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009**

Find out that Dave was in the film industry before it went bust in Toronto several years ago. He started a cafe. Wanted a physical space for the unphysical Linux.

**Mid December, 2008**

Start promoting the event. Include a profile of the event on a website that I am developing LearningInTheCity.com this becomes the main webpage for the event. Post the workshop idea of the Linux Caffe website and blog. Email the workshop idea to Now Magazine listings page, blogto.com and other listing pages.

We are also featured on Torontoist, a journalist from the Blog asks for a description of the event and a picture. The picture I procure comes from CreativeCommons.org.

Try to use the social networking site Facebook to advertise event. I run into problems using Facebook. I can only get the information out the the small circle of friends that I have listed. Posting the information to 'Walls' gets me into trouble with Facebook administrators for spamming. I resort to contacting admin of groups for them to send information to their members, but with little success for promotion. However, I do add a person or two to my friends list this way.

Facebook works poorly for promoting events, those interested in something have already joined a group or event and tune out all other information.

**December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008**



Hosting first of four DIY Workshop @ the Linux Caffe – Make your own jewellery from old computer parts.

About a dozen people show up. Some people heard about the event on Craigslist, other from Now magazine, some from the poster in the store. A high mix of girls because it is about jewelery. We go about 2 hours and a half hours. A guy that is an electrical engineer showed up he knew soldering and starting demonstrating to people.

**December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

Write commentary about the evening on my web page [LearningInTheCity.com](http://LearningInTheCity.com).

Which came first the jewelry or the motherboard? I just finished hosting a workshop on jewelry making from old computers parts. It went excellently, 12 people came for the fun evening. In under two hours we had stripped a couple of laptops, some CD-ROMs and a DVD player then soldered them back together making funky jewelry. Thanks to Linux Caffe, and Dave, for the workroom. Putting on this workshop I've come to wonder about how people come to acquire technical skills. Luckily we've had an electrical engineer come along who was extremely helpful in showing everybody at the table how to solder properly. Making a proper electrical board is a tedious, thought heavy, skill heavy challenge. Making jewelry is fun, easily to do, and even if it goes wrong you still get something interesting for your time. More people wear jewelry then play with electrical boards. Jewelry is an outward expression of who you are, a functional electrical board helps you produce something else which allows you to do other things. An item in itself vs. an item for itself. But, let's examine the similarities, in both work sessions you are trying to create something, you are trying to make your thing look pretty, you are trying to solve problems that come up. Doing one activity helps improve the other. In human history our species has always put lots of care and effort into our art. Where you find spears you find sculptures. We've always assumed that the spears came first then the sculptures. Spears we assume are necessary, sculptures are not. But why do we think this way. In rituals first we adorn ourselves, first we gather in social events, first we create the ceremonies, then we hunt, war, and sacrifice.

Art is either a technical skill that is too difficult to reduce to a science or art is an introspection and critical commentary of the world around us. Not all art has to be revolutionary and not all technical skills have to be at the same pinnacle of an elderly craftsman.

Sitting with 12 strangers, the talk drifted to conversations about how this can be done, or that fixed. For an evening we created our own rules about what we were doing, and discovered the rules of a craft as old as our culture.

**January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009**



Host second of four DIY workshops @ the Linux Caffe. -Robot Sculptures

Three South Korean girls come, they finished university and were here to study English. Two others thought of



coming, that were sitting in the cafe, but didn't. It was a cold dark night. All of the people that came out heard about it through the posters at the cafe. The best advertising is the most local to the event. Though using Facebook and other emails lists, the turn out was mostly from those that knew the cafe.

It isn't about what you create. We ended up giving what we created to the cafe for it to display. It was about the process of connecting with others, connecting with who was in that room, we ended up talking about ourselves. Meeting new people.

We also ended up creating things using our imagination's, something that takes about 30 minutes to fire up, before all the real action with drills and glue guns takes place.

Everyone wanted to learn things that were not part of the workshop, like English for them, soldering for me.

Taking photos of the process is what everybody was doing with their cameras. The event is both for itself and in itself. You want to show other people what you did and you want to do something new.

The time comes with the activity, it flows to fit the 2 hour time frame, with everybody finishing about the same time.

The amount of people attending a workshop affects the logistics of the event. Size of room, but it doesn't affect the the feeling you get teaching people. It is enjoyable seeing people do things.

Everything you create looks good. It is astonishing how nothing with art turns out bad.

Now I have to write up a wavier for participants.

### **Monday January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009**



Host three of four DIY Workshop @ the Linux Caffe - Building a wind chime from an old computer.

This evening we built wind chimes from old computer parts. 4 people came for the fun and everybody walked away happy with what they made.

Nervous of not having people show up. Whenever I running a workshop I get that feeling in my stomach when I think that nobody will show up. If nobody does show up, well at least I've got a few hours to do something that I



like doing anyways, hacking old computer parts.

There is an archeology of knowledge that happens when taking something apart. Taking apart an old Macintosh computer we found that it had an IBM hard drive and other sourced chips from various companies we wouldn't have of associated with a Mac. We recalled the various deals Mac had made over the years with companies to produce its parts. It was a rediscovery of the past, and a remembering of how we, the companies around us, and the tools that we've used came to be here.

It was also a chance to talk about other DIY cultures, how reggie started from the thousands of old oil drums left by the Unites States army in the Caribbean after the second world war. Those drums where cut up, tuned, and used as musical instruments.

Because this dealt evening dealt with sound we were rediscovering sound, always listening to how things clank, what made what sound, banging things together, discovering noise. Everything has its own sound. Yes it is an old computer, but it has a sound to it. I can't describe in technical terms what makes a good sound, but now I can look at a piece of metal and instinctively know what kind of clamour it will make.

It was also good to see people come again, two previous people came from the last workshop. I've always been fascinated by how people count. Public transport agencies count by the trip, and the number of people they claim to service per year is always much bigger then the population that lives near the transit system, by a multiple of 800, so I always have to do mental math to see how many people actually used public transport. I'm not sure if I should count how many people can to the workshops I've hosted altogether, or add how many people can to each workshop by how many I've hosted. Two different possible counts.

#### **January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Bought 6 old CD-ROMs from Craigslist for \$5, meet the guy at the subway station - Don Mills. Purchasing for your own workshops with Craigslist is interesting.

#### **January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Go to a dollar store to buy USB cables. The dollar store seems to have many bits and pieces that can be used in a myriad of ways and purchased cheaply.

Get a phone call from somebody about the workshop. They saw the listing in NOW. NOW magazine got the wording for the listing wrong. It should have read "make a usb powered fan from an old cdrom" no "make usb from old cdrom". Most confusing. NOW is great place to list because so many people see it, but sometimes skips over listing for a week or mis quotes listing.

#### **January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009**



Host four of four DIY Workshop @ the Linux Caffe - Building a USB powered fan from an old CDROM.

My girlfriend came, part obligation, support and curiosity. Stumbles through the technological aspects of the activity, taking apart the CDROM to get at the motor (we were all trying to keep up with the grade 6 kid), but gets through it. Has fun with the aesthetics of the project, building the fan blade. In retrospect I should have made the project more explicit and shown a picture of what we where going to do. But, now that I've done it I have a picture to show.

It was a step by step process of stripping a CDROM and building a fan from the motor within, powered by a USB cable.

A father and son come. He is a violin repairman that works from his home studio. Went to U of T to study social science then to England to study violin building. The kid is in 6th grade but looks younger, did he skip a year?

Talking to kid, they only two computes in his regular classroom, one works, and it is used by the teacher to check personal email.

The kid seems very knowledgeable about computers and technological things. His father seems to encourage him to build and examine things. The kid takes things apart and builds them very well. Says that he has been using email since grade 3, chats with his friends in chat rooms. Has his own email address. He found the workshop through the flyer posted in the cafe.

There does not seem to be too many father/son things in this city. A lot of after school art/dance/sculpture classes but nothing technical.

Sent emails of the event to the father and son since they didn't bring a digital camera with them.

The owner of the cafe enjoyed having hosted the event, though more in the future would be good.

### **January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

Calculate that I mostly broke even on the venture. A little under 20 people altogether came, for about \$100 in total. Cost of supplies such as glue, extra tools, parts and such amounted to that much. 8 hours of my time in the workshop and just as many doing prep work, practising the activity, promotion, and collecting material. \$100 divided by 16 hours is \$6.25 an hour.

Write up of activities take as long as activities.

Was it worth doing. Yes.